

THE VALUE AND RANK OF THE BELIEVER

NO. 1671

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you:
therefore will I give men for you, and people for your life.”*
Isaiah 43:4.

ONE of the worst mistakes we could make would be to judge our condition before God by our outward circumstances. Know you not that the ungodly have their portion in this life? They increase in riches, their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart can wish. They are not in trouble like other men, “neither are they plagued like other men,” therefore pride compasses them about as a chain, violence covers them as a garment. Poor creatures, they have no joy in the world to come, and therefore God permits them to have as much joy as they are capable of in this world. They stand upon slippery slopes, and fiery billows rage below. How are they cast down as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. Envy them not, and never dream that they are beloved of God because, like the beast which is fattened for the slaughter, their manger is full of corn, and their rack is overflowing with fodder.

As for the people of God, they are often in great trials. David said of himself, “All the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning”—as if his heavenly Father whipped him as soon as he was up, and kept him under the rod all day long. Such chastisements are not unusual in the family of grace. Many of God’s best servants are rich in faith, but extremely poor in pocket; strong in the Lord, but sadly weak in body; beloved of heaven, but abhorred by the men of the world. Many of those, whom the Lord loves most, endure sharp affliction, even as the most precious metal is likely to see the most of the fire. Is it not written, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten”? “What son is there whom his father chastens not?” The Lord scourges every son whom He receives. Therefore, never judge yourselves by outward circumstances, for these are not the balances of the sanctuary, and cannot help you to a just conclusion as to your state before God. Everything may seem to go against you, and yet all things may be working together for your good. Jacob was no good judge of his own matters when he cried, “All these things are against me.” He needed Egypt and a sight of Joseph to teach him the reason for the Lord’s dealings. Everything may be prospering with you openly, and yet you may only be as the victim which is covered with garlands when it is being led to be slain at the altar. Everything may be grieving you and yet securing your best prosperity. Our Heavenly Father has, I think, given us the words of the text and the context by way of comfort in reference to His outward dispensations. If God has a favored people whom He has chosen, upon whom His distinguishing grace has lighted to make them great and honorable, you would suppose that the second verse of this chapter would run thus—“You shall not go through the waters, for I will be with you to keep you out of them; neither shall you pass through the rivers, for I have bridged them on your behalf. You shall never go through the fire, and therefore you shall not be burned. Neither shall there be any fear that the flame shall kindle upon you, for it shall not come near you.” There is no such word of promise. It would be contrary to the whole tenor of the covenant, which always speaks of a rod, and of the chosen passing under it. On the contrary, it is here supposed and taken for granted that we shall have to pass through fire and through water to get to heaven, and it is put thus—“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.” And then it comes in, in the language of our text, that although the chosen are bound to go through fire and through water, yet they are precious in God’s sight. Oh true believer, rest in perfect peace! Although you have to pass through unnumbered afflictions, yet you are honorable and safe, for the Lord will make any sacrifice that He may secure your safety. He will give all mankind for you, for the word is not in the singular, “I will give man for you,” but He will give all things, yes, whole nations of men for you, sooner than you shall perish, so determined is He that you shall be saved.

Come, then, dear tried people of God—come to the text and see whether you can find comfort in it. I know you will not be disappointed if the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, shall apply it with power to your souls.

I. First, THE LORD COUNTS HIS PEOPLE TO BE PRECIOUS.

The text was spoken of a nation, whom He had chosen, but what is true of a nation is true of each individual in that nation, at least, what is true of Israel is true of every Israelite. If God has loved His church He has loved every member of that church. And if His church is precious in His sight, so is each individual believer. Is not that a blessed word, “You were precious in My sight”? In your own sight you appear to be unworthy, insignificant, and undeserving, but yet you are precious in the sight of the Lord. I know that when the Lord gives us a soul-humbling experience, we are made to feel as if we were worthless worms, good-for-nothing, incapable, ungrateful, undeserving, ill-deserving, and hell-deserving. “God be merciful to me a sinner,” is often the cry of the most sanctified child of God. Yes, and the nearer he gets to the likeness of Christ, the more he mourns over his deficiencies, till he is like David who had spoken all through the 119th Psalm of his love to God’s word and his delight in it, and yet concluded the psalm by saying, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant; for I do not forget Your commandments,” as if that were the conclusion of the whole matter, and the utmost to which he had attained. Only the ignorant and self-exalted will talk of their own goodness. Saints mourn because they perceive sin remaining in them. The divine assurance of our text comes in as a blessed counterbalance to our lowly sense of our own worthlessness. The Lord Himself bears witness, “You are precious in My sight.”

A child of God is often far other than precious in the sight of others. Men of God are often as broken pitchers in the sight of men, only fit to be thrown away. If they become earnest, people say that they are almost out of their minds through religion. If they are quiet, their critics remark that they are moping and melancholy. Nothing you can do will altogether please men of the world, they are sure to pick holes in your coat one way or another; it is the way of them. We are not precious in their sight, for they value glitter, and pomp, and riches, and the things which perish in the using. They can do without Christians, so they think. Albeit the people of God are the very salt of the earth, and the light of the world, yet they are utterly despised and rejected. “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!” Ah, well, but, child of God, you are precious in God’s sight, and that is infinitely more than being precious to princes. You live in a little room alone, and few know you, and those who do know you do not think much of you, but the Lord says, “You are precious in My sight.” Poor old Mary, who has been bed-ridden for years, fears that her friends think her a burden, but let her be comforted, for her best Friend says, “You are precious in My sight.” John, the carter, with his large family, small wages, and shabby clothes, yet fears the Lord and walks with Him, and no man may despise him, for to the Lord he is worth more than his weight in gold, and his Redeemer says, “You are precious in My sight.” A humble working man has come to worship with the Lord’s people, all unknown to fame, he has only one talent, which he tries to use, and he is often downcast because he can do so little for his Master. Yet the Lord says, “You are precious in My sight.” And is it not better to be precious in the sight of God than it would be to be precious in the sight of kings and queens and the great ones of the earth? May you not be well content, like your Redeemer, to be unknown and despised, if the Lord does but say, “You are precious in My sight”?

Do you know, sometimes, these words of our Lord quite take me aback? It is so wonderful that I should be precious to the all-glorious Jehovah. I remember being startled once when that word in Solomon’s Song came with power to my soul—“You are all fair, My love; there is no spot in you.” It shone so brightly on my soul that it seemed to give sunstroke to my faith, and I almost whispered, “I cannot believe it.” Yet it is even so. We know how lovers will exaggerate and use hyperboles in their expressions, but the Lord our God speaks not after the fashion of foolish men. He is seriously in earnest in all that He says. But still I was set wondering. Could it be that Jesus could speak thus, in His infinite love to me? I needed to remember the power of the washing in His blood, and the power of His cleansing Spirit, and the power of His justifying righteousness, before I could understand how He could say such a word to me. Do you not feel a bit staggered as you hear this word, “You are precious in My sight”? Does not unbelief prompt you to say, “Lord, that love-word is meant for somebody else? It cannot mean me.” And yet, if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God, and it is to you that this text is spoken, “You are precious in My sight.”

How can this be? I think the text explains it. Read the first verse. “But now thus says the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and He that formed you, O Israel.” It is clear that we are precious to God because *we are His creation*. The first creation was marred upon the wheel by sin. It became a thing without honor and came under the curse. But he that believes in Jesus has been created anew by the work of the Holy Spirit. God has in a very special sense created him. He has gone beyond mere creation, having first created the clay, He has *formed* it. We are not half-made or ill-made in regeneration; we are formed as well as created. The Lord who has given us spiritual existence is daily giving us fashion and completeness. Having first given us life, He has tutored that life. Having planted the tree, He has pruned it. He has created us and formed us, and in both He has worked according to the counsel of His own will. In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, but afterwards the first chapter of Genesis tells us how God fitted up the heavens and the earth, to be man’s abode, forming what He had before created. The earth, though long before created, was “without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” In the moment of regeneration we are like that newly-created world, but as by the Lord’s power the world was brought into light and order, so by divine grace the work of sanctification goes on stage by stage, till Christ is formed in us and we are formed in His image. Now, because the Lord has done a great work upon us equal to a creation, and a formation, therefore we are precious in His sight. How a man will love a garden when he has laid it out himself! How he will admire the fruit that comes from trees which he planted with his own hands years ago, and to which he has attended himself! When we see our work in anything, it has great value in our eyes. Work is a great creator of preciousness. You know how a little piece of metal, which intrinsically may be scarcely of any worth, can have such work put into it that from half a farthing it can rise in worth to hundreds of pounds. Skilled, artistic work makes the most common material to be as precious as a gem. Think, then, of what the Lord has worked upon us. We who seemed to be intrinsically so worthless have the workmanship of God upon us, for “He that has worked us to the same thing is God,” and by that workmanship, that creation, that formation, He has made us to be very precious things. From an old horseshoe the artificer may make a clasp of rarest workmanship and thus has the Lord done with us. Though we were like the common pebbles that lay in Jordan’s brook, the Lord has of those stones raised up children unto Abraham. Though we were but as the dross that is cast out at the pit’s mouth, to be left there as worthless, yet the Lord has taken us up and transformed us into silver and gold, that we may make a crown for Himself, world without end. Has He not said “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise”? Oh, but this is sweetly clear and sure, the creative work of God upon us has made us to be precious in His sight.

But what does He say next? “I have formed you: I have redeemed you.” I wish I could sit down in that chair and let somebody else talk of this most divine subject. Here is the reason why we are precious in the sight of the Lord—it is because *we have been bought with precious blood*. Can we contemplate the sufferings and the death of Christ for us without feeling that whatever He intended to accomplish by such sufferings and death must be an object most precious in His sight, an objective that He will certainly achieve? Some seem to fancy that Christ either had no purpose at all in His death, or else that He played at haphazard, redeeming all men, or no men, as the chance might happen to turn out. They say that He was a substitute for all men, and yet it is clear that many of them are lost—lost, though redeemed with His precious blood. I am loath to repeat the statement, though to them it does not appear to be profane. I know this—I would not willingly give my life on a speculation. I must be well convinced that a grand result will certainly follow, or I will not even risk my life if I can help it. And I cannot conceive the infinitely wise God, our Savior, as laying down His life for any purpose but that which will most certainly be accomplished. What He bought, He will have. What He purchased, He will receive. If a thing is bought with your money, it becomes precious to you. And though it may be a bad bargain, yet if it cost you dearly, you do not intend to lose it. You value it too much to throw away that which has cost you so dear. And Christ has not thrown His blood away, or wasted it, or spilt it on the ground for nothing. He shall see of the travail of His soul.

Come back to a view of yourself. Have you believed in Jesus? Then you know by that mark, that He has redeemed you from among men. Do you believe in Jesus? Then you are of His sheep. Christ laid down His life for His sheep. Do you believe? Then you belong to His church of which we read, “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” You see the specialty of His redemption as coming to those of you who believe in Him; therein you have the key of our text.

Now you can understand why you are precious, redemption makes you so. “I bought that woman,” says Christ. “Amidst my pangs and groans and death I saw her—saw her through the tears that filled My eyes. I also saw that man; My prescient love beheld him in his sin, and beheld him as redeemed from them when I bore his sin in My own body on the tree.” Oh, blessed thought! We must be precious to Him who has not only created us, but has laid down His life for us, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” The agony and bloody sweat cause me to understand my Lord’s saying, “You were precious in My sight.” In any case, the Spirit of God in our text assures us that such is the fact, we are precious unto God—the jewels of His crown, the apple of His eye, the portion of His possession.

Another blessing of grace is mentioned in the chapter, and that is that God has *called us*. “I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” There is a work of grace called effectual calling, by which the Spirit of God calls out the redeemed from among men. They lie with the rest of the fallen mass, knowing nothing about what Christ has done for them, ignorant, indifferent, and insensible. But free grace calls them out from the mass of the dead. Many calls are given to them in the gospel—to them amongst others—indeed, to all men, for the call is to all the sons of men, but they regard not the invitation. Even the elect refuse the voice of the Lord till God in sovereign grace puts power into the word, and then it comes as a personal call; as it is written, “I have called you by your name.” Then the summons of love comes effectually, and they are made willing in the day of the Lord’s power. Being effectually called, they spontaneously answer, “When You said, Seek you My face, my heart said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek.” Jesus knows when He called you, do you remember it? Some of us remember it as distinctly as ever the two sons of Zebedee recollected when Jesus called them as they were fishing, and promised to make them fishers of men. The day is as distinct to us now, as it must have been to Matthew when he sat at the receipt of custom, and Jesus said unto him, “Follow Me.” We have been called, as surely called as the child Samuel when he was upon his bed, for our spiritual ears have heard the voice of God, and our hearts have answered, “Here am I; for You did call me.” Yes, beloved, we know our calling, and it is well for us to be fully assured that therefore we are precious in the sight of the Lord. Effectual calling has made us so. He drew us, and we followed. He called us, and we answered to the call. Therefore are we dear to the Father to whom we have returned; dear to Jesus by whom we have been reconciled; and dear to the Holy Spirit who has led us into this grace.

We have been *ever since kept by His rich grace* and preserved, and this also has endeared us to the Lord. Those to whom we have shown great favor are sure to be dear to us. We love those to whom we have acted lovingly. The Lord has daily called us from one stage of grace to another. “Friend, come up higher,” is a word that we hear from time to time, and we expect to hear it soon for the last time when He shall bid us rise from earth to heaven. Then will He say, “Friend, come up higher, and we shall sit down in the highest room.” He is always calling, and by His grace enabling us to answer the call, and therefore we are precious in His sight.

But I do not care so much to think over the reasons as wish to get you to grip the truth, each one of you on his own account. Perhaps you are downtrodden and despised, oppressed and depressed, your spirit sinking within you? If so, rejoice that you are precious to God. You are nobodies, so the world says, and so you think, but for all that, the Lord declares that you are precious in His sight.

Now, will you try to think that many and many a poor soul that as yet knows not Christ is as precious in His sight as you are? They are His sheep, though not yet the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand—

*“Oh, come! Let us go and find them,
In the paths of death they roam.”*

Let us go and hunt up the lost jewels which belong to Jesus. All the treasures hid in a field have not yet been found. God has a chosen people in the back slums, in the lowest haunts of vice, let us go forth and seek them. “I have much people in this city,” He said to Paul, and I believe that He has much people hidden away in the holes and corners of London. If poor fallen men and women are precious in His sight, though they may be the outcasts of the streets, though they may be thieves and drunks, let us never despise them. Let us never say, “Oh, I cannot be associated with such!” “Precious in My sight,” says Jesus, as He points to them, “Precious in My sight,” as He points to the poor fallen woman. “Precious in My sight,” as He mourns over the blasphemer. Go after the degraded haunter of the street, and never rest until you have the happiness of bringing her to Him who bought you and bought her with His most precious blood.

Brethren, do you not think that if you are precious in Christ's sight, then everything that has to do with Him, ought to be precious to you? Oh, how you should value Christ! Is He not your all in all? Everything that is connected with Him ought to become dear to you. Some of His people are very disagreeable people, and we cannot feel much joy in their company, but we must still love them. Remember what Augustine said, he declared that he loved every man that had "*aliquid Christi*"—anything of Christ—about him. "Precious in My sight," says Christ of this brother and that. Let them, then, be precious to you, and be it your joy to cheer them and succor them for Jesus Christ's sake.

Think once more. If you are precious in God's sight, do not despise yourself so as to fall into the follies and vanities which please other men. The ungodly may do as they please, but here is a charming check for you, Jesus says of you— "Precious in My sight." Then, Lord, I cannot go into amusements which some others so much delight in, for if You have said, "Precious in My sight," I cannot be found among the giddy throng. If there is a sin that once was sweet to me, and I find it to be sweet to many of my friends, I will abstain from it with all my heart, and try to get them to do so also, since You have taught me that I am precious in Your sight. Nobility has its obligations. We do not dream of seeing princes of the blood running in the streets and playing with the children of the gutter. No, something better is expected of them. If you are precious in God's sight, let the obligations of discriminating grace lie upon you; maintain a holy separation from the world. Heirs of heaven, behave as such. Children of the eternal King, remember the dignity of your condition, and so walk that you live not inconsistently with what the Lord has done for you.

That is our first point. In the Lord's esteem His people are precious.

II. Now, secondly, they being precious, He adds another epithet. "Since you were precious in My sight, YOU HAVE BEEN HONORABLE."

Is not that another blessed word? Alas, how many of God's people were the reverse of honorable before they knew the Lord. Many a dishonorable thing they thought, and said, and did and it is the dishonorable life that makes the dishonorable man. They are honorable now, but possibly they were children of shame at their birth. Perhaps they lived in sins that are not to be mentioned lest the cheek of modesty should crimson, and yet they are honorable now. Perhaps they went so deep in sin that the laws of their country convicted them of crime, and yet—wonder of divine grace!—as soon as ever they are precious in God's sight they are honorable. All the past is blotted out. It shall be remembered against them no more forever. They take their rank among the honorable. I do not know that I should care to be called "right honorable" among men, for there are too many right honorables whom we could not honor, patrons of the race course, the betting ring, and the prizefight. The name is a falsehood when applied to debauched men whose only worth, lies in their money. But an "honorable" that God calls honorable is honorable indeed. Although, previously, that poor soul may have been everything that was dishonorable, Jesus says, "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud, your iniquities," and that free pardon puts him among the honorable. Those who trust the Lord Jesus are honorable, "for unto you that believe he is honor." The humblest child of God that lives is honorable, for he belongs to a right worshipful family. An angel thinks it an honor to wait upon him, bearing him up in his hands lest he dash his foot against a stone. "Honorable!" Why, all nature honors the elect of God! The saints of God are the center of all providential arrangements. Next to God, for the church all things exist, for so the Lord has put it, "He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel," and "all things work together for good to them that love God." The stones of the field shall be in league with them and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with them. The Lord gives a charge to all the powers of nature that they are on the side of the man who is on the side of God. Honorable! Why, we are the most conspicuous objects of the divine forethought from all eternity—the most esteemed subjects of the guardian care of heaven in all time, and we shall be the most eminent objects of divine love throughout a whole eternity when the Lord shall make known, through the church, to wondering angels and principalities, the manifold wisdom of God. "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable."

Now let a poor child of God tell how he believes that he is honorable.

First, dear brethren, we are honorable by *birth*. Some are proud because they have been born of fathers who have been made baronets, or elevated to the peerage in years gone by, thus by birth they are honorable, that is the way people talk, and it must be so among men as long as there are classes and ranks. Descended from the King of kings, each saint has a lineage before which the pedigrees of princes grow stale and humble. He that is "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ

from the dead,”—he that is born of the Spirit of God—he into whom God has infused His own nature—he is honorable by birth, in a sense which none can dispute. Not by blood, but by the new birth which comes from the Spirit of God, every child of God is made both precious and honorable.

Next, we become honorable by our *possessions*, for men pay honor to those who become millionaires and are immensely rich. Alas, the gains may have been dishonorably made, and then the honor that comes of wealth is a stench in the nostrils of good men and angels. But, brethren, our wealth that we get by our new birth is such that we are richer than the wealthiest of worldlings, and must in consequence be honored. Paul says, “All things are yours—whether things present, or things to come, or life, or death, all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” What an estate is that which belongs to every heir of heaven, for we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” and thus we become indeed honorable.

Yes and the child of God, becomes honorable in *rank*. To be a child of God is to occupy a rank surpassing all human dignity. A child of God is a “prince of the blood imperial,” I was about to say, but still better than that, he is a prince of the divine line, he is a child of God. No dignity can excel this. One who is a child of God has a rank which he could not wish to change though all the empires in the world should lie at his feet to tempt him with their glories.

Beloved, we then become ennobled by our *relationship*. When a person is related to some great man, he has a degree of honor reflected upon him. It may be by marriage that the relationship is made, but it is all the same. Honor comes with honorable connections. Since, then, we are related to God by the spiritual birth, and united to Christ by the spiritual marriage, we are partakers of the honor of God our Savior. Beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when Jesus shall appear we shall be like Him. Jesus is, “the first-born among many brethren,” and we as the younger brethren are all honorable.

We are honorable by *calling*, for He “has made us kings and priests unto our God,” and these among men are the most noteworthy of all callings, none more honorable than priests and kings of God’s own making. By divine grace we have become honorable by *character*, for the Lord has sanctified His people and made them to love that which is good and right, and to forsake that which is evil. By His grace they shall no longer bear the fruits of the flesh, but the fruits of the Spirit shall be in them and abound, and so, being honorable according to God’s calling, they shall become honorable by a conversation agreeing therewith. Theirs is an honorable *life*, they live for an honorable purpose, they are quickened by an honorable spirit, they are wending their way through an honorable destiny on earth to glory and honor and immortality and life eternal. Therefore may they rejoice that God has made them honorable.

The lesson to be learned from it is, do not let any child of God be bashful, shamefaced, and cowardly in the presence of men of the world. It becomes us to be lowly and meek with all humbleness of mind, but not with any kind of meanness, so that we would flatter the great, or cringe before the powerful. We are greater than they, for they know not the Lord, and he is greatest who knows best the Great One. Why should we fear their threats? Who are we that we should be afraid of a man that must die? Who are we? We ought to feel ourselves to be too honorable to fear the son of man who is crushed before the moth. “Princes did sit and speak against me,” said David, “yet I declined not from Your statutes.” Who are princes? If they speak against God’s children, they speak against those who are more honorable than they. They revile their superiors, compared with who they are but mimic monarchs. Do not therefore go about with the bearing of a menial, but with the air of a king. I would like to walk as Abraham did among men. He was every inch a king, the sons of Heth could do no other than respect the princely patriarch. Poor Jacob is often beggarly with his bargains and his tricks; he cuts a sorry figure as compared with his majestic grandfather, the Father of the faithful. Abraham so trusts his God that he is the independent man everywhere, he lends, but he does not borrow; he is the head, and not the tail. When he stands before the king of Sodom, how more than royal his bearing! The king would give him the spoils which were, indeed, justly his according to the laws of war, but he replies, “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelace, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.” The child of God is too honorable to take what other people would take, if thereby he would stain his dignity. He may often feel it unbecoming his dignity to do that which is lawful. He may therefore choose a more excellent way. Lions will not be found stealing little bits of meat like cats, or feeding on carrion like dogs. It is not for eagles to hawk for flies, and it is not for children of God to stoop below the glorious level of their new birth. “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable.” Oh, you right honorable, take care to act honora-

bly. My brethren, we do not wish to be called “reverend” any one of us, but God has called us honorable, and it would be a fairer title by far for us to wear. Reverence, surely, we can never claim, that belongs but to one. But if He calls us “honorable,” I venture at least to call you “right honorable.” O you right honorable, always live as right honorable. Do not let us hear of you that you spoke in a fit, for that is to act like a spoiled child. One of God’s honorable in a passion, uttering burning words! This will never do. One of God’s children doubting God, afraid to trust his heavenly Father, and trying by little tricks of trade to get on, instead of being honest! Is this a conversation such as becomes the household of faith? Is not this the reverse of what becomes us? There is one that cannot forgive his brother, is that seemly? He will not speak to his friend because of some small offense, is that honorable? Some that profess to be God’s children seem to think it a poor business to be a Christian. Brethren, think not so. Have a high idea of what a Christian ought to be, and then pray the Spirit of God to raise you up to it. If you have been called a king in the eternal covenant, I pray that you may be anointed to your office with a horn of oil by the divine Spirit, that about you there may be regal qualities such as become a king, and a sacrificial life such as befits a priest, for God has indeed made you to be a king and a priest unto Him.

III. Be of good cheer, then, as you pass on to the third point. “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable, AND I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

Ever since the Lord has manifested Himself to you, He has loved you manifestly. He has not only told you of His love in the secret of your soul, but He has publicly acted in love to you. I desire you to get that truth fully into your mind. Ever since the time of your conversion—yes, and long before that—ever since He loved you, He has acted in love to you. “Oh, but I have been very ill, frequently bound to my couch, and my bed has been as painful to me as though it were of red-hot iron.” Yes, yes, but He has loved you, and put you to that pain to glorify Himself and to benefit you by preparing you to receive more of His love, and to manifest more of it to others. “Since you were precious in My sight, I have loved you.” Is there not a well of delight in that assurance? “Oh, but I have been in the dark as to my Lord. I have not walked in the light of His countenance, and He has hidden Himself from me. I have had many questions in my conscience as to my condition before Him.” Just so, because He loved you He would not let you be happy unless you were in a right state before Him, and He has put you in the dark because you were not fit to be in the light. He loved you, and He saw you to be a naughty child, and therefore He resolved that you must be put in the corner. The Father could not smile, for to be smiled on by God when we are indulging in sin would be a curse to us, and not a blessing. Our Father loves us too much to let us be at ease in sin. Will you try to remember that the Lord has loved you and kept on loving you all these years, and He has never thought an unloving thought towards you nor has He done an unloving action towards you in any shape or form. He has looked out for wise ways in which to exhibit His love to you, and He has done the very best for you. He has loved you infinitely; His whole heart has been set upon you. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout all the earth to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him. God loves you as much as if there were not another saint for Him to love. Can you believe that? God puts the center of His love in Christ, and if there is any other center of His love, you are in it, because God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere, and you and I and each one of us may thus be the actual center of the love of God in Christ Jesus. Although there are ten thousand times ten thousand of my brethren for God to love, He does not mean to love me any the less. If I have so many to love, I must cut my heart in pieces, but His great heart is so capacious that He gives the whole of it to you and the whole of it to me. Even as the Father loved the Son, so He does love His people. Jesus says, “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Continue you in My love.” He is loving you now. The great Father is looking down upon you with infinite delight and boundless affection at this instant. Cheer up, then! Cheer up! Let nothing distress you. Did I hear you complaining that you are all alone? Are your father and your mother dead? Perhaps years ago. The friends that you have been living with have been taken away, and you are friendless and alone. Some of us, who have got to middle life, or past it, see our dear old friends going to heaven in flocks. We sometimes wonder what we shall do for friends when we grow old ourselves, if we are spared. But that is a sweet word, “When your father and your mother forsake you, then the Lord will take you up.” “Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” Is God, thus loving us? Then it is enough. Let us fall back upon that love and say, “Your love, my Lord, is all I can desire.”

Well, now, if God loves us so, shall we not love Him? Awake, O heart that sleeps! Awake, awake, and give back to God all the love of which you are capable. And shall we not love poor sinners for Christ's sake? Shall we not try to love them to the Savior? The greatest converting power in the world, next to the Holy Spirit, is the power of human love. Men are never saved by scolding, and an angry preacher is not likely to bring many to a loving Savior. We must love sinners so much that they must be saved, or we will break our hearts. When we get to that, God will make us to be instruments in His hands of gathering in His chosen. Let us turn into flames of love. Oh, to be transmuted! Someone said, "What is Basil?" and then he dreamed that he saw a pillar of light and heard a voice saying, "This is Basil." Oh that we might be, in character, like burning and shining lights, and may our light and fire be love to God and love to men. Surely He that has made us precious in His sight, and made us honorable, and loved us so, deserves that, for His sake we should go out and seek His lost precious ones and bring in the dishonorable, that they may be honorable. If it is written "I have loved you," let us feel the force of heavenly love, and serve the Lord with gladness.

Now, poor souls, you that have had no share in all this text, you may have a share in it. Is there anyone here who is empty? Christ has come on purpose to fill him. Is there a soul here that is hungry after God and salvation? Then it is written, "He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He has sent empty away." Sinners are scarce articles. "Why," you say, "they are common as blackberries." Yes, those that will say they are sinners, but those who truly feel that they are sinners are very scarce. A sinner is a sacred thing; the Holy Spirit has made him so. He that really knows his sinnership is redeemed by Christ. He is the man that Christ came to save. He is the man to whom infinite blessings belong. He is the man who may lift up his heart unto God and rest in Jesus. You blind eyes, Christ came to open you. You prisoners, Christ came to set you free. You good-for-nothings, you ungodly ones, you sinful, you that have no good thing in yourselves, but are despairing at the gates of hell, "unto you is the word of this salvation sent." Christ has come to save such as you are. For proud Pharisees, Christ has nothing. He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He came not to fill the full, they want it not, nor did He come to heal the healthy, they need it not. But He comes to save you that have no good thing about you—that have no good feelings within you. You that have no broken hearts, He comes to give you broken hearts. You that have no faith, He comes to give you faith. You that have no repentance, He comes to give you repentance—

*"True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh!
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy."*

And oh, what a surprise it will be for you to hear His Spirit saying to you by and by, "Because I loved you before the world was—because I had chosen you—because I had determined to save you, because you were precious in My sight, therefore you are honorable, and I have loved you. Come and rejoice in Me."

God help you to do so, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 42, 43 (PART).
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—735, 242, 731.**

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